COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS | 100

Transforming International Affairs Education to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Insufficient leadership, outdated curricula, and alienating school climates leave future foreign policy experts ill prepared to address the social forces contributing to fragility and unrest globally. Transforming U.S. foreign policy requires a comprehensive educational strategy on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

March 08, 2021

Protesters hold up placards as they "take a knee" in front of a police line at a Black Lives Matter demonstration outside the U.S. Embassy in London on June 7, 2020, during a weekend of global rallies against racism and police brutality. Justin Tallis/AFP

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Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion issues are among the United States' greatest leadership challenges. America faces profound societal fissures at home, even as there are similar diversity challenges around the world. The U.S. government's underestimation of the import of growing inequality and exclusion is resulting in destabilization, creating security risks, and damaging U.S. interests.

International affairs schools help shape the next generation of national security leaders, but they risk contributing to America's continued vulnerability by failing to address the security implications of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues at home and abroad. A lack of school leadership, outdated curricula, and alienating school climates leave future foreign policy experts ill prepared to confront how the United States' inequalities currently undercut its standing in the world and unable to effectively address the social forces shaping fragility and unrest globally. Fortunately, over the past two years, there has been some progress in international affairs education, supported by dozens of deans from Harvard University, Princeton University, Columbia University, and beyond. Positive steps include a diversity and inclusion standard in the accreditation process for public policy schools, the launch of certification programs focused on gender issues in foreign policy, and—in response to the anti-racism protests of 2020—the inclusion of courses focused on race and racism in curricula. But more work needs to be done to ensure that schools of international affairs and public policy prepare the next generation of leaders to meet contemporary challenges head on.

To improve national security and strengthen U.S. diplomatic capacity, all U.S. schools of international affairs and public policy should develop concrete plans for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion across their programs. These plans should outline steps to bring more attention to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion across curricula, to foster an inclusive climate, and to build a diverse school community. Only with a comprehensive and strategic approach that updates American universities' attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues can the United States provide continued leadership in a globalized world.

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The Security Implications of Inequality and Exclusion

Today, the security risks posed by inequality and exclusion are growing in magnitude. Migration has increased the heterogeneity within nation-states, which offers economic benefits [PDF] to host countries and provides security [PDF] for tens of millions of people displaced by conflict. But awareness of migration's benefits is scant; greater focus is placed on the tensions it can create within societies. Simultaneously, digital technologies are increasing the extent to which diversity is perceived within societies and increasing the risk that perceptions are manipulated by malign actors seeking to drive and leverage polarization. Heightened vulnerabilities caused by such crises as global climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic intensify the destabilizing combination of growing inequality and greater awareness of inequities in many of the world's most populous countries—including in the United States.

The Implications of Domestic Inequality and Exclusion for U.S. National Security

Continued neglect of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in the United States creates vulnerabilities, reduces U.S. influence, and limits the effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy. Polarizing discourse, growing inequalities, and disparate treatment of different

subpopulations across the United States all drive instability and compromise national security.

Vulnerability to External Manipulation

The domestic uproar over racial justice in 2020 manifested in massive nationwide protests and episodic violence. The response underscores a lack of national attention to managing the United States' changing demographics, growing polarization driven by exclusionary narratives, disparate treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, and persistent and growing inequities. The domestic social fissures created vulnerabilities to cyberattack. Russia used social media to foment discord and racist sentiment, much as it had in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, and in 2020 it was joined by China and Iran in weaponizing offensive social media operations to further inflame social divisions and weaken democracy in the United States.

Reduced Standing Globally

Continued domestic unrest and fragmentation undermine the U.S. government's credibility in promoting democracy and rule of law. One potent example: immediately following U.S. protests in 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian asked, "Why does the U.S. side criticize Hong Kong police's civilized and restrained law enforcement while it threatens to fire guns at domestic protesters and even deploy the U.S. National Guard to suppress them?" 2020 also saw the UN Human Rights Council consider investigating systemic racism in the United States and saw the African Union Commission condemn racism in the United States against Black people; both cast a long shadow over the United States' reputation as a beacon of democracy and as a peaceful, multiethnic nation.

When extreme polarization and divisive rhetoric fueled by exclusionary narratives resulted in the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, a flood of critical reflections from abroad further reduced America's standing globally. Calling for the United States to lift its economic sanctions on Zimbabwe over concerns about the country's democracy,

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa tweeted that the events "showed that the U.S. has no moral right to punish another nation under the guise of upholding democracy." Indeed, from the 2020 murder of George Floyd to the 2021 Capitol attack, the power of the U.S. example has been diminished, as has faith in the ability of the United States to facilitate and enable the spread of democracy abroad.

Suboptimal Foreign Policy Decision-Making

The U.S. government similarly overlooks the lack of diversity across its national security apparatus, despite substantial evidence that greater diversity—across gender, race, and ethnicity—improves workplace effectiveness. Across sectors, research has shown that diverse teams make better and more innovative decisions. In the corporate world, for example, diverse companies invest more successfully than and financially outperform their least diverse counterparts.

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Notwithstanding the data, a 2020 Government Accountability Office report found that the proportion of women and Black employees at the U.S. State Department actually declined over the past two decades, with progressively lower diversity at leadership levels. Diversity across the armed forces also leaves much to be desired, with stubbornly white leadership pipelines. Further, commitments to diversity are frequently not appreciated as fundamental to success, and homogeneity in the international affairs field is not recognized for the weakness it presents—as demonstrated by the continued lack of political will to increase diversity in the U.S. government. Indeed, across government and

business, leaders often view advancing diversity and inclusion as legally mandated or ethically appropriate rather than as essential to success; this reduces, for many, the urgent need for course correction.

The Implications of Inequality and Exclusion for Global Security and Stability

The security implications of inequality and exclusion are strikingly similar around the world. Persistent or growing inequality and feelings of inequity—that is, perceptions of unfairness and injustice—are driving mass demonstrations. Those seen across the United States have become increasingly common globally. Protests often channel segments of populations' perceptions of an unresponsive or discriminatory government. Sometimes, movements decry growth in the number of migrants and refugees. Other times, marches protest inequities or advance support for diversity. Compounding the challenge, growing disparities in wealth and income are roiling many of the largest countries in the world.

Decreased Social Cohesion

Recent protests lay bare polarization and resentment spurred by changing demographics. Countries are more heterogeneous than ever, with an influx of migrant workers seeking economic opportunity and record numbers of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution. While increased immigration offers important social and economic benefits—including labor for aging nations [PDF] and security for refugees escaping war—growing diversity also can provoke political and social tension. Countries as varied as the United States, Germany, India, and Kenya face popular discontent over the shifting composition of their populations. Frequently, these movements are fomented by feelings of exclusion and marginalization. Unfortunately, as the number of migrants and refugees grows, concerted strategies for integrating new arrivals, promoting peaceful coexistence, and educating residents regarding the benefits of diversity are rare; the gaps in attention and programming have consequences for stability and social cohesion. For example, in

Lebanon, the significant presence of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, who now make up almost one-quarter of the population, has shifted the political balance between subgroups and exacerbated domestic fissures.

Greater Propensity to Instability

Scholarly and applied research has long correlated discrimination and inequity with increased risk of instability. Persistent marginalization and exclusion can result in festering polarization and social fragmentation. Grievances driven by inequalities in power, wealth, and opportunity, particularly among subgroups within societies and communities, are linked to protest and radicalization, with consequences for social cohesion. The protests that swept across the Middle East starting in 2010 occurred despite economic progress in many countries; protesters called for greater social and economic justice, equal opportunity, and reduced inequality. For many people, well-being was not improving, and governments were perceived as unresponsive. Sadly, several of those nations have yet to return to stability following years of violence and conflict.

Conversely, promoting inclusion and equity among different groups within societies improves stability. Those efforts increase social cohesion and trust and augment faith in government and governance. According to the United Nations and the World Bank in their joint report on preventing conflict:

> The best way to prevent societies from descending into crisis—including but not limited to conflict—is to ensure they are resilient through investment in inclusive and sustainable development. For all countries, addressing inequalities and exclusion, making institutions more inclusive, and ensuring that development strategies are risk-informed are central to preventing the fraying of the social fabric that could erupt into crisis.

Reduced Potential for Sustainable Development

Inequality and exclusion also undermine developmental progress. Countries that fail, for example, to fully empower women collectively sacrifice trillions of dollars of potential income and slow their social, political, and economic progress. Similar evidence indicates substantial economic and social costs associated with LGBTQ+ discrimination. Likewise, the marginalization of ethnic minority groups reduces economic productivity by restricting labor force participation and driving inequitable access to social services. This, in turn, limits nations' well-being.

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Countries' failure to develop sustainably is often correlated with greater state fragility, with economic, social, and political underperformance [PDF] increasing the risk of conflict. Developmental interventions can address grievances and inequities, thereby helping prevent the outbreak of violence. Yet, efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts are regularly undermined by a lack of attention to the heterogeneity of societies. Ample evidence indicates that initiatives to maintain or reestablish stability following conflict would benefit from greater attention to the country's demographic mix. Indeed, greater investment in equity and inclusion would contribute to improved security and sustainable development.

Reduced Collective Well-Being

Looming global challenges increase the importance of ensuring inclusion and equality. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic is posing disproportionate [PDF] health and economic costs on minority and marginalized communities, which, at the same time, can create public health exposure for everyone and inhibit economic and social recovery writ large. Climate change is already disproportionately harming the world's most vulnerable and marginalized, depriving entire communities of their livelihoods and causing displacement and loss that further threaten instability.

Myopia Based on Ignorance of Historical and Embedded Biases

Despite the breadth of available research and practice on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues around the world, little of it is making it into the classroom. Without exposure to and training in how those issues shape U.S. foreign policy interests, the next generation of leaders is ill prepared. More fundamentally, U.S. foreign policy is hindered by a lack of awareness and knowledge as to how embedded biases and historic narratives impact current events. Much international affairs work was (and sometimes continues to be) premised on fundamentally incorrect preconceptions. For example, European (and later North American) international efforts were often premised on the supremacy of white societies, devaluing diverse peoples' and local and indigenous populations' rights, knowledge, and practices. Empires and colonial powers often sought to "civilize" populations and assist less-developed countries as a form of charity; today, the international affairs community continues to live with the legacies of that frame of reference and often promulgates (or enables the promulgation of) inaccurate narratives. U.S. foreign policy is dramatically constrained by ignorance of or blindness to the ways biased frames of reference hinder partnerships, collaboration, and collective global advancement. International affairs schools do too little to challenge this myopia, allowing and advancing its perpetuation in the foreign policy field through the education these schools provide.

What International Affairs Education Overlooks

With the responsibility of educating and preparing the next generation of foreign policy experts, graduate schools of international affairs and public policy have an obligation to ensure students emerge from the academy prepared to tackle global challenges. Yet, when it comes to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, international affairs education has failed to keep pace. Courses often overlook how racial, ethnic, and gender inequality and exclusion threaten national security and global stability. Historical and recent failures to manage diversity issues in the United States and around the world pose a vast array of security threats. To successfully deter threats at home and conduct foreign policy in ways that combat instability and conflict, leaders in foreign policy need to address polarization, marginalization, and inequality, and international affairs schools should help revitalize that field.

Unfortunately, much progress is needed. An in-depth study of fifty master of public administration programs found that courses rarely included substantial readings "on diversity and its various dimensions." Overall, only about 10 percent of syllabi consider gender and culture; race and ethnicity are explored 7.3 percent of the time, and affirmative action is taught in 6.2 percent of cases. Other dimensions of diversity—including age, ability status, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, and language—are explored less than 5 percent of the time. A similar study found that fewer than half of U.S.-based graduate schools of international affairs incorporate gender issues in their courses, despite a wealth of peer-reviewed articles, robust datasets, and policy briefs supporting their implications for national security and global prosperity.

Increasing the magnitude of the challenge is the lack of diversity in school populations. Many diverse candidates enter the public administration field—women earn the overwhelming majority of master's and doctoral degrees in public administration—but once faculty, women are disproportionately represented in roles that limit their career trajectories and decrease opportunities for senior leadership or research. Broadly, women and people of diverse backgrounds are promoted and tenured at lower rates; they also face greater barriers [PDF] getting their scholarly research cited and published. Similar challenges are found in the international affairs field; though the majority of students are

women, they are underrepresented among faculty and leadership. Fewer than 20 percent of deans of international affairs schools are from diverse backgrounds; fewer than 40 percent of deans are women. Ethnic and racial diversity are also lacking among faculty and students. This underrepresentation undercuts efforts to improve curricula and climate; indeed, as departments become more diverse, school climate improves, and research [PDF] and curricular coverage of diversity- and inclusion-related topics rises.

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There has been some progress over the past few years. A new diversity and inclusion standard was introduced in the accreditation process for public policy schools. The Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs has focused particularly on increasing the diversity of students choosing foreign affairs careers. Multiple schools including Texas A&M University, Georgetown University, and the George Washington University have created programs focused on gender issues in foreign policy. The Fletcher School at Tufts University includes gender and intersectional analysis in international studies among its focus areas for graduate students. In response to student protests, the Harvard Kennedy School in 2020 introduced a two-week mandatory course, “Race and Racism in the Making of the United States as a Global Power.”

Additionally, a network of dozens of deans from public and private schools across the country is focused on advancing diversity and inclusion in international affairs education. The University Leadership Council on Diversity and Inclusion in International Affairs Education (ULC) is helping schools of international affairs and public policy navigate efforts to advance the focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, including those

relating to the curriculum, as well as the culture and composition of school communities. Building from scholarly research and analyses, the ULC is discussing best practices and lessons learned from work at colleges and universities across the country.

Some critics will suggest that an academic focus on issues related to diversity and inclusion around the world is an unnecessary distraction from pressing international relations and national security priorities. Others will think of diversity as relating solely to the composition of the school population. Yet the growing body of evidence indicates that we ignore the broad import of these issues at our own peril. They are proving to be fundamental drivers of violent conflict, extremism, fragility, and underdevelopment. Not incorporating attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues is leaving the next generation of international affairs professionals unequipped to deal with the reality of nation-states and the challenges facing them today.

Recommendations

For the U.S. government to successfully navigate the global transformation currently underway, schools of international affairs have to better equip students so that they in turn can improve national security and strengthen U.S. diplomatic capacity. A multifaceted effort is needed—one that critically examines and addresses the composition of schools, the climate across schools, and the curriculum. This comprehensive approach is necessary because all these issues have to be addressed to ensure that diversity is valued, inclusion is assured, and equity is achieved.

Demonstrate Leadership

Deans and directors of international affairs schools should explicitly lead their institutions in recognizing the centrality of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to national security and to successful navigation of global affairs. There is no substitute for outspoken leadership.

As a foundation for transformative action, schools should undertake baseline analyses of attention paid to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues across programs and use that knowledge to develop strategic plans that address weaknesses and enhance focus within their programs. To be durable, any effort to tackle the range of challenges related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion needs be strategic and transformative. A baseline review should examine course offerings, curricular coverage, and ongoing research; the composition and relative compensation, benefits, and financial aid levels for faculty, postdocs, PhD candidates, students, and staff; and the school climate across campus and within classrooms. Based on the analysis, schools should create a diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan outlining the issues that need to be addressed and the plan for improvement; such a plan should be specific and actionable, with metrics for progress and a strategy for monitoring and assessing progress. Regular periodic reviews and accountability for implementation are needed to ensure steady progress.

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Schools should diversify their faculty and leadership pipelines. High-potential candidates of diverse backgrounds are often overlooked and undervalued in recruitment efforts for faculty and leadership positions. Their research may be underappreciated, particularly if it focuses on related dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion within international affairs. They may have attended schools that are less familiar to selection panels, leading candidates to face school-related biases. At times, they are not aware of job announcements because they have different professional networks and alternate sources of information. Schools need to broaden outreach and perspectives on candidates. Further, they should consider requiring diversity statements of applicants to ensure they are building school communities that value inclusion.

Schools should factor diversity, equity, and inclusion issues into tenure and promotion reviews. Faculty and administrators of diverse background often bear disproportionate responsibility for supporting and mentoring an increasingly heterogeneous student body. Yet they usually receive little recognition or compensation for their contributions to school climate or student well-being. In fact, at times, they are actually disadvantaged in performance reviews, because their advising and service to the academic community constrains their research and publishing, with consequences for their careers. Academic leaders need to consider how to recognize and compensate diverse staff and faculty for their contributions, whether by offering financial compensation or course release, for example, or by altering tenure and promotion regimes to value contributions to school culture and well-being.

Update Curricula

Schools of international affairs and public policy should ensure their curricula consider diversity and the implications of exclusion and inequality around the world. Students should be asked to consider how issues of identity affect global affairs and U.S. national security. A variety of approaches are viable, including introduction of new required courses, adaptation of introductory international relations and political science courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, or addition of mandatory topical seminars discussing movements for inclusion or intersections of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues with subtopics in international affairs. Schools should ensure that all students are sensitized to the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to global peace and prosperity.

Class syllabi should be retooled to feature scholarship by diverse experts and to consider how diversity, equity, and inclusion influence global affairs and national security. Classes today often fail to incorporate peer-reviewed research and policy briefs authored by scholars of diverse backgrounds. Additionally, they fail to discuss the impact of societies' heterogeneity on security and global affairs, notwithstanding extensive research into how diversity, marginalization, and inequality affect stability and prosperity. Recent thought-provoking scholarship examining how questions of diversity and exclusion influence

global affairs includes Amitav Acharya's *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics*; Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen's *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*; and Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam's *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*.

Students should understand how U.S. history and contemporary domestic discord influence and affect global affairs and U.S. foreign policy. Students should appreciate that domestic and international affairs intersect. Countries closely watch U.S. management of internal affairs; it influences the United States' reputation and the behavior of other nations. U.S. foreign policy ought to be reflective of domestic affairs as well. Excellent scholarship such as Brenda Gayle Plummer's *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* discusses the implications of U.S. racial struggles for American foreign policy. Further, the intersection of race, inequality, and security is compellingly examined in books such as Robert Vitalis's *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*. Those works are complemented by a range of recent articles that consider how bias shaped and continues to influence global security policy and international development. These pieces include Uma Kothari's "An Agenda for Thinking About 'Race' in Development," Michele Swers's "Building a Reputation on National Security: The Impact of Stereotypes Related to Gender and Military Experience," and Célestin Monga's "Discrimination and Prejudice in Development."

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Schools should offer specialization opportunities, such as through concentrations and certification programs. Even as schools introduce the student body as a whole to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in global affairs, they should also enable the training of specialists. The practitioner community is seeking out the assistance of gender and social inclusion experts in navigating diversity and tackling marginalization, polarization, and inequality. Yet few academic institutions currently enable students to specialize and hone their expertise. Too few schools offer concentrations and certifications that would produce specialists and strengthen the global practice.

Create an Inclusive Climate

Schools should recognize and address race, gender, and socioeconomic inequality on campus. Wide disparities persist within school communities. Differences in socioeconomic status create food insecurity and threaten internet connectivity for many. First-generation students need greater guidance and mentorship. Bias—both unconscious and explicit—distorts the classroom environment, as well as the career paths of faculty and staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the disparities. Low-income students are abandoning their studies at far higher rates. Racial and ethnic minority community members are facing disproportionate infection and fatality rates. Female faculty research and publishing have declined disproportionately, as women have assumed increases in elder and childcare. At the same time, issues of race and equality have elevated discussions

around legacies of discrimination. Schools need to address the disparities as well as the legacies of racism, inequality, and marginalization and how they affect school communities. For example, the University of the South, or Sewanee, is addressing its troubled past through the Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation, which is named for Sewanee's first tenured African American professor. The effort explores the university's relationship with slavery, Jim Crow, and the perpetuation of the Confederacy. Georgetown University is seeking to face its history through its slavery, memory, and reconciliation effort examining Georgetown's legacy of slave ownership and trade.

Schools should recognize and address inequalities off campus in host communities. At the same time that international affairs schools explore issues of inequality and marginalization around the world, they need to enable recognition of similar phenomena and their costs in the United States. Doing so deepens understanding of shared global challenges, teaches students about problem-solving, and strengthens the social fabric here at home. It also creates incredible opportunities for applied and experiential learning. Carnegie Mellon created a program to engage with local law enforcement around public safety that evolved into a course. At Sewanee, the Office of Civic Engagement is encouraging all students, faculty, and staff to undertake community service.

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Schools should create climates for the study of international relations that create a pipeline of diverse expertise into the practice. The dearth of diverse foreign affairs professionals reveals that schools are not successfully cultivating the strongest possible cadre of experts.

America is weaker for it. For U.S. foreign policy to be as effective as possible, international affairs schools need to provide a robust pipeline of diverse leaders; that depends upon maintaining a welcoming climate. International affairs schools need to engage more with diverse student communities, recruiting the best and brightest early in their education and offering them promising paths to career success. Further, schools have to focus on cultivating the inclusive climate that is needed for students of diverse backgrounds to thrive. In the absence of concerted efforts, U.S. national security will be compromised long-term.

Conclusion

A focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in global affairs is long overdue. The lack of attention has created vulnerabilities at home and abroad. Only by engaging the educational community can we transform the face and shape of U.S. foreign policy to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. A comprehensive effort by international affairs schools to revitalize their leadership, update their curricula, and create an inclusive climate will pay dividends for decades to come.

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